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SUBJECT: CENTRAL EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE SHOWS COALITION
BUILDING IS KEY TO EU POLICYMAKING

REF: A. BRUSSELS 134
[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 280
[1](#)C. BRUSSELS 331
[1](#)D. BRUSSELS 382

Classified By: USEU POLITICAL M-C CHRIS DAVIS, FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and Introduction. Experts agree that effective EU policymaking is driven by coalitions among member states. They also agree that the Central European states that joined the EU since 2004 have only recently begun to employ coalition building. As a corollary, some EU experts contend that the U.S. could better influence EU decision-making by identifying coalitions and approaching bilaterally the key member state within it, prior to approaching the EU institutions. Some argue that Russia has shown considerable dexterity at working the EU coalition building process to block EU consensus. The most effective coalitions are likely to be dynamic constellations of member states drawn from Western and Central Europe that share U.S. positions -- or an openness to support such positions -- on certain issues. When working with Central European states in particular, it is important to consider widespread perceptions in the region that their support of U.S. policies and initiatives have been taken for granted. As Central European member states become more experienced and confident EU members, they are likely to become more independent actors, underscoring the need for constructive transatlantic relations with these new member states.

[1](#)2. (C) This cable is the fifth and final in a series (REFTELS) looking at how the Central European states that joined the EU since 2004 -- Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia -- commonly known as the CE-10, are faring within EU institutions, especially when it comes to initiating policies in Brussels. End summary and Introduction.

Coalition Politics is the Name of the EU Game

[1](#)3. (C) On January 22 Poloffs met with a former U.S. official now with a thinktank in Brussels to discuss the topic of Central European activism in the EU. Speaking broadly about the EU, this U.S. observer noted that he is routinely surprised at how easy EU institutions are to penetrate and

how malleable they can be if approached with an apt understanding of the EU coalition building process. Such an understanding is essential to influence EU policies, he said.

The U.S. observer grouped the new member states from Central Europe into three groups: 1) those that aspire to influence; 2) those that aspire to influence but cannot; and, 3) those that do not want to create waves and are largely content to follow the EU consensus. Poland, he argues, is doing better at working within the EU than under its previous government and he believes that if this trend continues Warsaw could wield the most influence among the new members over time. Speaking about the other Central European member states, this contact contends that Romania aspires to influence, but currently suffers from a lack of credibility, despite its size. The Czech Republic is trying to build influence and has a good opportunity to do so with its current EU Presidency, but the Czechs are hampered by domestic political maneuverings that are eroding Prague's EU credibility and influence (Note: Topolanek's government fell after this discussion. End note.) Hungary does not seem to have much interest in influencing EU policies and is predominately focused on its domestic economic and political challenges. Lithuania is seen as the most active of the Baltic States within the EU and has shown a willingness to block EU consensus, even if it must stand alone. For example, after Warsaw relinquished its de facto veto over the renegotiation of the EU's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia, Vilnius remained the sole holdout.

14. (C) Jim Cloos, Director for General Political Questions in the General Secretariat of the European Council and an

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astute observer of the EU scene, told Poloffs on March 23 that he has noticed differences among the CE-10 policy positions on nearly every issue, which result from their differing economic, historical and cultural experiences. This, argued Cloos, has prevented CE-10 states from organizing coalitions on a more geographic basis. As an example, he pointed to the EU Summit on the economic crisis on March 1, in which Hungary was effectively isolated from its Central European peers by Budapest's calls for special economic bailout assistance. Cloos noted that German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned the Central Europeans at this meeting that perceptions matter greatly; she asserted that such requests would likely trigger capital flights from countries requesting special assistance. Having argued their differences, Cloos opined that domestic and economic priorities on the part of the CE-10 largely prevent them from taking a more active role on EU external policies. The one state which he asserted punches above its weight is Poland, pointing to the Eastern Partnership Initiative, and he noted that over time, Romania could also begin to show more activism in the EU. Cloos pointed out that he has already begun to see signs of this, as Romanian officials are constantly seeking to raise the profile of Black Sea issues with the Council.

EU Decision-Making Often Occurs in
Informal Working Groups

15. (C) Cloos noted that the increase in the number of member states and the push for greater openness in decision-making in the Council has ironically led to less transparency. He pointed out that policy is often created on the sidelines -- in hallways or at lunches -- of meetings such as the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAREC) and the Political and Security Committee (PSC). The U.S. observer agreed that EU foreign policy decision-making most often occurs within informal groupings of "the quad" in which France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom, as well as three to four additional countries on an issue-by-issue basis, meet to determine the course of EU policy. For example on the Eastern Partnership Initiative -- largely

judged by local pundits a success of Warsaw's refocused ability to influence the EU -- Poland, Sweden, and to a somewhat lesser degree the Czech Republic, joined the quad in crafting this policy (REF C). On Middle East issues, Spain plays a role in the key grouping, whereas the new member states from Central Europe are absent. A similar circumstance exists on Iran policy, with the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and now Italy in the lead.

Opportunities for U.S. to Work within
EU Coalition Building Process

16. (C) The U.S. observer told Poloffs that some EU bureaucrats consider Russia to be more adept than the U.S. at playing the coalition politics game in the EU. He posited that this is personified by Ambassador Chizhov, who has spent some twenty years focusing on how the EU works, and is especially skilled, albeit more often at blocking the EU consensus process. He added that U.S. diplomats too often deliver talking points and lack the ability to negotiate and to conclude deals.

17. (C) The U.S. observer opined that the EU probably would welcome a more active U.S. policy role on matters of shared concern, such as energy security, climate change, democratization and human rights. He noted that Washington has an opportunity to drive the EU agenda precisely because of the EU's loose operational style. One way this observer suggests that this could be realized is by meeting bilaterally with the various states that matter on a particular issue in the early stages of policy formulation, even before approaching EU institutions. Elaborating, he suggested identifying the member states that can punch above their weight on particular issues, and then forming partnerships with a constellation of such states to advance

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or block specific proposals. He was quick to point out that such initiatives can rarely be crafted exclusively from groupings of new or old member states; Central European states need to be attached with more experienced member states to form shifting coalitions of critical mass. This U.S. observer posited that the more EU understanding Washington displays in constructively engaging the EU, the more pro-U.S. the EU can be.

Central Europeans Looking for Greater Respect from the U.S.
as they more Closely Align with Western EU member states

18. (C) Marek Evison, Foreign Policy Advisor to Joseph Daul, Chair of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, cautioned Poloff on March 6 that while working with Central European countries, Washington needs to resist taking these countries for granted. To illustrate his point, Evison, a Pole, described unfulfilled Polish expectations that the U.S. would assist Warsaw with military modernization. He stressed that where military assistance has occurred it has been seen as a failure, such as Poland's F-16 purchase. While Washington may not be able to compete with the levels of EU financial assistance to the region, Evison told Poloff that Washington needs to show Central Europeans that they are respected and appreciated, if the U.S. is to retain influence in the region. Evison stressed the importance of student exchanges, and he also called for more military exchanges, particularly for junior officers.

19. (C) Piotr Kaczynski, a Policy Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies, told Poloff on March 23 that over time, Central European states will become more independent actors, perhaps less interested in working as closely with the U.S., and instead preferring EU-based partnerships. He

maintained that Central European states almost certainly will continue partnering with Western EU member states to advance initiatives -- such as the Polish-Swedish cooperation on the Eastern Partnership Initiative. On the economic front, Kaczynski pointed out that the approximate 223 billion dollars (176.6 billion Euros) of EU Structural and Cohesion funds available to Central Europe from the EU over the next seven years (REF D) will bring Central European states living standards closer to those in Western Europe, possibly reducing differences in their EU positions on economic and social issues.

¶10. (C) Kaczynski asserted that the U.S. maintains comparative advantage over the EU among Central European member states in the field of security. He could not envision the EU being able to sufficiently satisfy Central European military security concerns in the near to medium term, and instead thought the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, NATO, would retain paramount importance in this regard. This point was underscored in a March 24 meeting with Georgi Gotev, a Senior Editor with the Brussels based EurActiv media outlet. Gotev asserted that Washington's role of continued relevance in Central Europe is as the sole credible security provider, especially given perceptions in the region that NATO is already overburdened with Afghanistan. He pointed to what he judged to be continuing desires of political elites in the region for U.S. military presences to illustrate his point: military bases in the case of Romania and Bulgaria and missile defense launchers and radar site in the case of Poland and the Czech Republic, respectively. Still, Gotev recognized that popular support for such initiatives is low, and convincing skeptical publics of their importance will prove challenging.

¶11. (C) Valentina Pop, a journalist with EUObserver.com, asserted to Poloff on 25 March that many in Central Europe perceive that the U.S. has "checked off" Central Europe as fully cemented in the West and that Washington's focus has shifted elsewhere. She noted this was evidenced by the significant reductions in U.S. public diplomacy efforts throughout the region. She cautioned about the risk of democratic backsliding in some countries. She pointed to increased popularity of nationalist and extremist parties in

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Bulgaria and Romania after their 2007 EU accession. Pop judged that the U.S. is a more effective bulwark against democratic backsliding than the EU, which has much leverage after these countries became full members. Pop argued that the region is significant because Central European states can best illustrate to the world that transitions to fully functioning democracies are possible. She projected that as Central European states become more effective EU policy initiators and coalition builders, they will be better able to advance democracy initiatives in the EU, as Lithuania and Poland have done on Belarus and the Czech Republic has tried to do on Cuba. She said she was not surprised that Poland, which has been one of the quickest to learn how to influence EU policies, has been effective at getting EU attention and resources focused on Belarus, its Eastern neighbor, while Romania has been so far ineffective at elevating its parallel concern, Moldova. She thought this was an apt comparison, and argued that concerns over Moldova are equally justified given the frozen conflict in Transnistria, but noted disappointingly that this issue gets little traction in Brussels. (Note: Belarus, too, is viewed by Germany as a viable economic partner, whereas Moldova is not. End note.)

¶12. (C) Comment: The accession of the Central European states to the EU greatly enhances our ability to form and build coalitions that can sway the policy of the EU as a whole. Even when they were new to the EU, and relatively passive, we needed their votes, whether on economic and environmental policy, where qualified majority voting is the rule, or in foreign and security policy areas, which require consensus. But now, five years since their accession, the

Central European member states are becoming more skilled at playing the EU policy game. We should increasingly consider playing the game with them, and especially on areas of greatest concern to them, especially Russia, Ukraine and other Eastern neighborhood policies; democracy and human rights promotion; energy security, and climate change (where they can be a brake on some of the less practical EU aspirations). Early and frequent consultations with individual Central European members about how they see the other EU member states trending on a policy issue, identification of possible "coalition" allies, quietly coordinated approaches to influence policy outcomes in Brussels, will both demonstrate that we do not take these EU and NATO members for granted, and help ensure that we get the right results with the EU. End comment.

MURRAY

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